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# ***TransEdu Scotland: Researching the experience of trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff in Scotland's colleges and universities***

**Dr Stephanie Mckendry & Dr Matson Lawrence**

## **About this document**

This document provides an overview of the *TransEdu Scotland* empirical research project, including the main research findings and recommendations. Open-access practical tools, case studies and resources for developing policies, provision and leadership will be hosted on [www.trans.ac.uk](http://www.trans.ac.uk) from November 2017, as part of the broader TransEDU project.

## **Key findings**

- Applicants, students and staff from the majority of Scottish institutions, including *all* HEIs and two-thirds of FE colleges in Scotland, and across a wide range of discipline areas, participated in the research project. This suggests a high likelihood that there are trans and gender diverse people working and studying in *all* colleges and universities. It is, therefore, necessary for all to have proactive processes and policies in place to support this often overlooked and potentially vulnerable group.
- In total, 158 people participated in the research, including 157 survey respondents and 20 interview participants. While no overall population figures are currently collected, it has been estimated that trans and gender diverse people represent between 0.6% and 1% of the UK population (GIRES, 2011). Given the small population size, the high levels of mental health issues, and the often negative nature of their experiences in employment and education, this represents both a reasonable sample size and an acute area of concern.
- Research participants reported experiencing high levels of barriers to their learning or work, with 86% (n=135) of survey respondents experiencing barriers in direct relation to their trans status or gender diverse identity. The biggest challenge concerned peer relationships with colleagues and fellow students, with many experiencing ignorance and hostility. There were also numerous issues around the provision of gender neutral facilities, and navigating administrative processes. Research participants often had very low expectations and many felt unsafe or unwelcome within classroom and wider campus environments.

- The survey indicated that 35% (n=44) of survey respondents had withdrawn from a course at college or university before completion. 24% (n=27) of those answering the survey from a university perspective had withdrawn – this is a higher proportion than general withdrawal rates for undergraduate study in Scotland, which was 7.9% in 2014/15. Nearly half of those answering from a college perspective had left their course before completion (n=17). The most common reason given for both withdrawal from study and extended absences from study or work was mental health issues (57%; n=33). Almost half of all survey respondents (45%; n=55) declared a disability or long-term health condition.
- Disclosure of trans status to institutions, such as for the purpose of seeking advice or support, emerged as significant issue. The survey indicated that 23% (n=29) of students and staff feel entirely unable to speak to their institution about matters relating to their trans status, with a further 33% (n=41) feeling only ‘a little’ able to do so.
- While some trans and gender diverse people within the further and higher education sectors felt willing and able to champion their cause – providing expertise, knowledge and awareness raising activities – many more did not. The majority of those interviewed expressed frustration at the expectations placed upon them to educate peers, colleagues and institutions. It is vital that support becomes embedded within colleges and universities, with allies willing to proactively develop provision and champion trans equality and inclusion.
- There is generally a very low level of awareness amongst staff and students around trans and gender diverse identities and experiences. This contributes to the sense of isolation and hostility described by many research participants. The sector must engage in sustained and committed programmes of trans awareness education, dialogue and celebration.
- A trans-aware named contact at each institution would be an effective way of providing accessible information and support to applicants, students and staff.

## Background

There is increasing evidence to suggest that trans people face significant levels of harassment and bullying within education. According to the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU, 2009) almost a quarter of trans students felt bullied or discriminated against since starting university and 23% of trans staff felt they had been denied a promotion as a result of their trans status. NUS research (2014) suggests that trans and gender diverse students are more likely to face harassment, bullying and assault than their cisgender lesbian, gay and bisexual peers, with only 20% feeling completely safe on campus and almost 50% having

seriously considered leaving their course. A 2016 report by the UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee stated that about half of young trans people and a third of trans adults attempt suicide (see McNeill *et al* 2012). The Committee argued that 'the levels of bullying and harassment experienced by trans students in further and higher education are unacceptable'. More recently, Stonewall's *School Report 2017*, whilst primarily concerned with the experiences of LGBT young people in schools, paints a picture of hostility and much increased levels of suicidality and self-harming behaviours among young trans people compared to the general population.

While there is growing recognition within the further and higher education sectors of the potential challenges and barriers trans and gender diverse people face, there remains a dearth of empirical evidence to inform leadership and the development of provision, particularly in Scotland. The *TransEdu Scotland* research was commissioned to address this lacuna, in order to provide empirical evidence for development in the Scottish sector. There is no evidence to suggest that the HE and FE sectors are performing worse than other sectors in terms of trans equality and inclusion, as previous research also points to endemic issues in employment, healthcare, and service provision. The HE and FE sectors are, however, uniquely positioned to continue to drive change and champion the rights of trans and gender diverse people within and beyond their campus communities.

## About the research

This project was undertaken by Dr Stephanie Mckendry and Dr Matson Lawrence, with support from the Widening Access and Equality & Diversity teams, at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. The research was carried out between July 2016 and June 2017, and was funded by the Scottish Funding Council. It aimed to examine the experiences of, and current provision for, trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff in Further and Higher Education across Scotland. The purpose of this research was to provide empirical evidence to inform the fulfilment of institutional statutory and ethical obligations, and to build an evidence base to underpin institutional Gender Action Plans, Equality Impact Assessments, Athena SWAN applications, and safeguarding strategies.

## Research questions

1. What barriers are faced by trans applicants, students and staff in the Scottish FE and HE sectors?
2. What are the support needs of trans applicants, students and staff in Scottish FE and HE institutions?
3. What monitoring practices, guidance and support protocols pertaining to trans people do Scottish FE and HE institutions currently have in place?

## Definitions

**Trans** is an umbrella term used to denote people whose gender identity differs from the gender and sex they were assigned at birth. This can include (trans) women, (trans) men, and non-binary and other gender diverse people. Trans people may make, or have made, social and / or physical changes to more closely align to their gender identity.

The term **gender diverse** can denote people who experience their gender identity as outside of the binary of man and woman, including non-binary, genderqueer, agender, and dual role people. We use this term in addition to 'trans' because not all those who have diverse gender identities use 'trans' to describe themselves. This term is also useful for those who are questioning or unsure about their gender identity.

Trans and gender diverse people are protected under the **Equality Act 2010**, currently through the protected characteristic of 'gender reassignment'. The Act proscribes both direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of a person's trans status, including in education, employment, housing, and the provision of services.

## Methodology

The project utilised an action research methodology to allow for an iterative and responsive research strategy, as well as the production of highly practical research outputs. In addition to being methodologically eclectic, action research is reflective and applied, involving an ongoing cyclical process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Coghlan & Brannick, 2009). As a methodology it has been utilised effectively in researching and enhancing student support within higher education (Hodgson *et al*, 2008; Mckendry, 2012).

The project had three distinct strands:

1. **Empirical research investigating the experiences of trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff.** This consisted of an online survey for completion by self-identified trans and gender diverse people who were prospective, current and recent applicants, students and staff at colleges and universities in Scotland. The survey was promoted through social media, via institutions, Students' Associations and staff networks, and through relevant third sector organisations<sup>1</sup>. Follow-up in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with all individuals who expressed an interest.
2. **Documentary analysis and mapping of current practice within Scottish HEIs and colleges.** This consisted of questionnaires, interviews and engagement events with Equality and Diversity and related staff from across the sector, to

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I (Page 23) for details of the third sector organisations who assisted with participant recruitment.

inform wider understanding of the current policy field, alongside the collection of best practice case studies.

- 3. Development of practical resources to empower institutions to develop their policies and activities, alongside a peer support Community of Practice.** The [www.trans.ac.uk](http://www.trans.ac.uk) website will launch in November 2017 and will host open access, reusable resources to support institutions in developing provision and meeting the research recommendations. See pages 21-22 for full details of dissemination events and activities during the course of the project.

## Findings: survey findings

A total of 157 participants completed the online survey, after partial completions were removed<sup>2</sup>. Importantly, responses were received from applicants, students and staff from 28 out of the 33 institutions in Scotland, and there were responses from people studying or applying to study at every Higher Education Institution in Scotland. Respondents represented a wide range of disciplines – including high demand professions such as Medicine – and at every level of study, from National 5s and Highers through to Doctorate level. Over 90% (n=137) of respondents were prospective, current and previous students. There were also responses from staff working in a range of roles or planning for careers in colleges and universities. Overall, 71% (n=111) of respondents were engaged in the university sector, 22% (n=35) in college, and 7% (n=11) in both.

## Characteristics of respondents

The online survey and subsequent interviews drew on the experiences of a diverse range of people. The demographic profile / characteristics of participants are set out below:

- **Age:** Respondents ranged in age from 16 to 60. The largest group (71%, n=88) were in the 16-25 age category: 22% (n=27) of participants were aged 16-18, 25% (n=31) were aged 19-21, and 24% (n=30) aged 22-25.
- **Ethnic heritage:** 93% (n=114) were white. 7% (n=9) were Black, Asian, dual heritage, or of another ethnic heritage. This is a higher proportion of respondents from BAME ethnic groups than the general Scottish population, which stood at 4% in the 2011 Scotland Census;
- **Nationality:** 89% (n=109) from UK – including 64% (n=79) from Scotland;
- **Sexual identity:** Over 90% (n=113) of participants identified their sexual identity or orientation outwith heterosexual. Sexual identities included queer (28%; n=34), bisexual (16%; n=20), lesbian (8%; n=10), gay (6%; n=7), and asexual (6%; n=7)

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<sup>2</sup> A number of survey questions were optional and so the total number of responses varied between questions. The number of participants – presented as “n=x” – has been provided alongside the percentages to provide clarity.

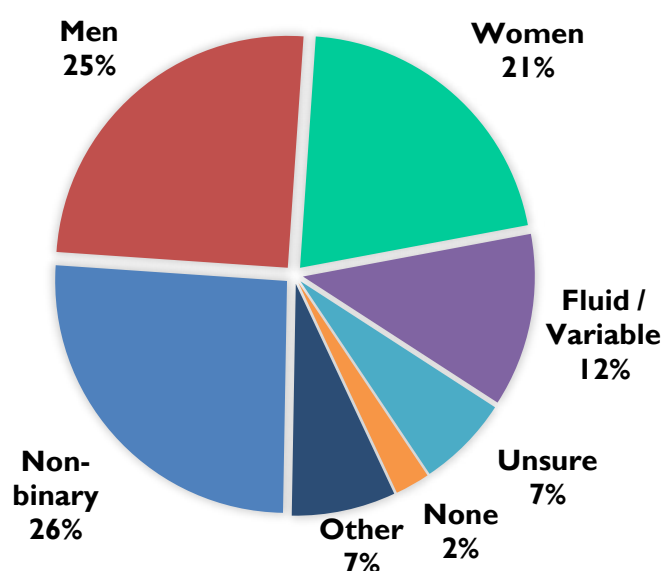
- **Religion, faith and belief:** 23% (n=28) declared a religion, faith or belief. 71% (n=87) declared none;
- **Disability:** 45% (n=55) declared a disability or long term health condition. This is higher than the general Scottish population, which stands at 19%;
- **D/deaf:** A very small number identified as D/deaf;
- **Social class:** 30% (n=37) identified as working class or as being from a socio-economically disadvantaged background;
- **Carer or care experience:** A small number of respondents were young carers or had spent time in local authority care;
- **Intersex:** A small number of respondents identified as intersex.<sup>3</sup>

## Gender identity

While many survey respondents identified consistently as men (25%; n=31) or as women (21%; n=26), over one third of respondents were more appropriately located under a gender diverse umbrella, including those with non-binary (26%; n=32) and fluid or variable (12%; n=15) gender identities. Thus, support provision, training and awareness raising activities that focus solely on binary trans experiences, to the exclusion of gender diversity and non-binary identities, will be ineffective for the larger population. The below chart and table displays the range of gender identities declared by respondents:

Gender Identity	Number of Respondents	Percentage
<b>Non-binary</b>	32	26%
<b>Men</b>	31	25%
<b>Women</b>	26	21%
<b>Fluid / Variable</b>	15	12%
<b>Unsure</b>	8	7%
<b>None</b>	3	2%
<b>Other</b>	9	7%

**PARTICIPANT GENDER IDENTITIES**



<sup>3</sup> 'Intersex is an umbrella term used by people who are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit stereotypical definitions of male and female. Intersex traits are natural manifestations of human bodily diversity' (United Nations, N.D.). Intersex is different to trans and gender diverse, yet an intersex person can also be trans or gender diverse.



## Barriers in further and higher education

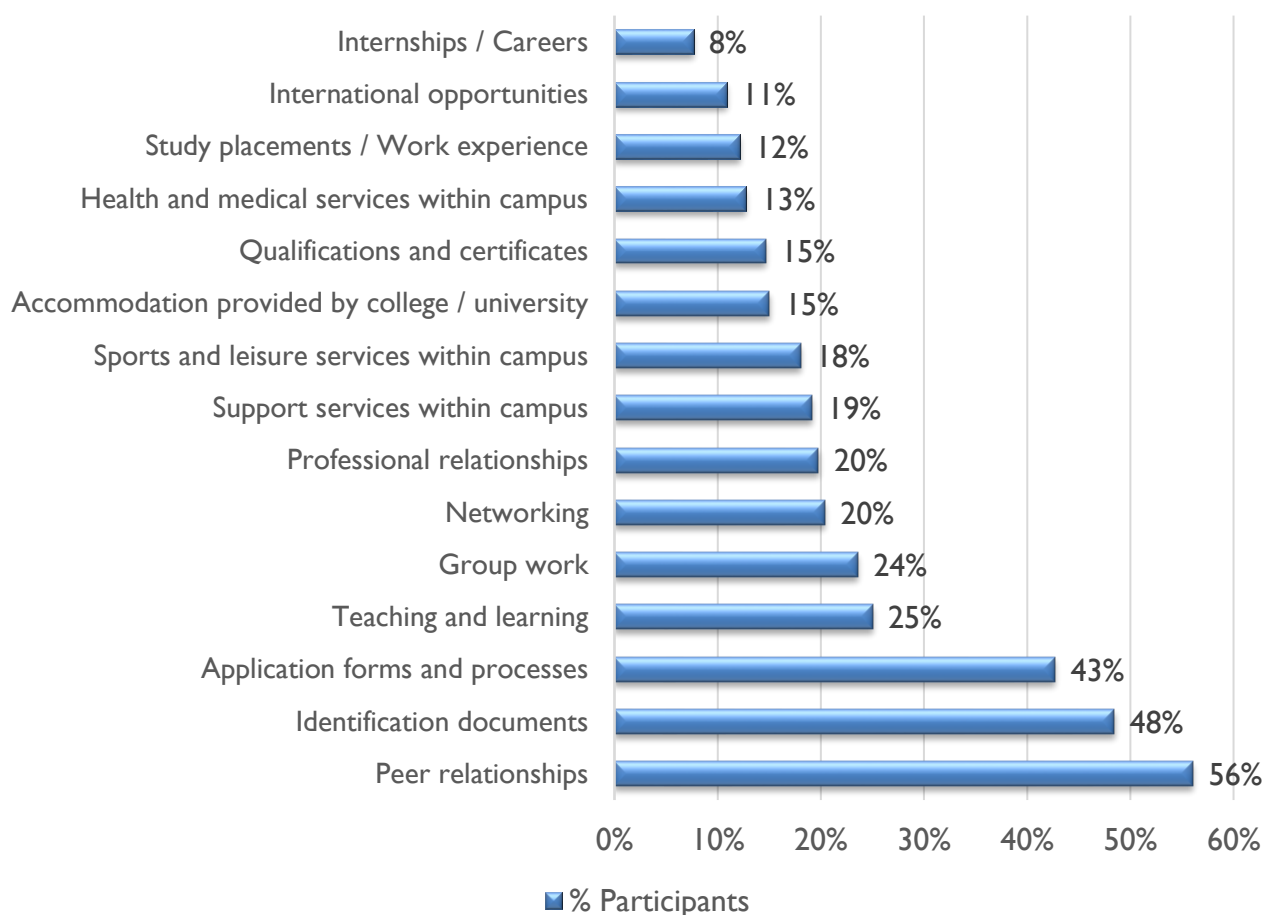
Survey participants were asked a range of questions about their experiences of education and employment in the Scottish HE and FE sectors. If they had experienced barriers, they were asked to identify the particular areas from a selection and were also invited to contribute free-text comments to elaborate further. These contributions were a rich source of data with many participants writing extensive narratives detailing their experiences and the barriers they faced.

- 86% (n=135) of respondents had encountered barriers in study or work relating to their trans status or identity. 18% (n=28) had faced many barriers, while 37% (n=58) had faced a moderate amount, 31% (n=49) a few barriers and 14% (n=22) none at all.
- 23% (n=29) felt entirely unable to discuss matters relating to their trans status or identity with their institution and a further 33% (n=41) indicated they could discuss issues 'a little'.
- Almost 50% (n=60) did not know whether their institution had a policy to support trans people. Of those who declared that their institution had policies relating to trans people, many stated that the current policies were unspecific and inadequate, e.g. under broader Dignity and Respect policies with little specific reference to trans or gender diverse people; or policies outdated and not fit for purpose.
- Over 50% (n=65) would recommend their institution to other trans and gender diverse people. Just 6% (n=7) of respondents would categorically not recommend their institution, whilst 40% (n=48) were unsure.
- 35% (n=44) of survey respondents had withdrawn from a course at college or university before completion. 24% (n=27) of those answering the survey from a university perspective had withdrawn – this is a higher proportion than general withdrawal rates for undergraduate study in Scotland, which was 7.9% in 2014/15. Nearly half of those answering from a college perspective had left their course (n=17). Of those who completed the survey, 31% (n=39) had taken a break from their studies or employment.
- The reasons for both withdrawal and breaks included mental health issues (57%; n=33); other disability or health condition (19%; n=11); bullying or harassment (12%; n=7); prejudice or discrimination (10%; n=6); financial circumstances (10%; n=6); and accessing gender-affirming healthcare/medical transition (9%; n=5).

## Areas in which applicants, students and staff face barriers

Survey respondents identified barriers from a list of areas, as set out in the below graph. Beside each category / area is the percentage of survey respondents that experienced barriers in each area:





Within the free text boxes, students noted that they faced barriers in relation to their peer relationships and the attitudes of fellow students and staff towards trans people. Many described the impact of being ‘misgendered’, either accidentally or deliberately by both peers and staff, being ‘outed’ or fearing that this was likely to happen, alongside overt bullying and harassment. Many students expressed difficulties within the teaching and learning environment, especially in relation to group work and in classroom and laboratory contexts.

The lack of a third gender option for gender diverse students and staff was problematic, as was a similar dearth of gender-neutral facilities (toilets, changing rooms and student accommodation). Other barriers identified by students included the difficulties of navigating institutional systems in order to update names and gender and the fear or actuality of inadvertent ‘outing’ through systems and administrative issues. Finally, many students pointed towards their intersecting challenges such as mental health conditions and disabilities as further compounding the barriers they faced.

For staff and postgraduate students, one of the main barriers was in relation to professional relationships and networking. These difficulties in interpersonal associations were very similar to students’ experiences – the one to one interactions so essential in both the further and higher education sectors. In particular, respondents pointed to

bullying, harassment and prejudicial behaviour, both overt and subtle, being outed as trans to colleagues and networks and the resulting impact upon progression, mental health and wellbeing. Application processes, job interviews and induction were identified as key points of challenge, as was securing adequate leave for gender-affirming medical care. Finally, there were difficulties around publishing and work histories, particularly where names and gender had changed. In such cases, and where there was no opportunity or support to retrospectively update these details, applicants and staff had to choose to 'out' themselves or forgo recognition for academic and professional achievements. As one staff member explained: "You just end up weighing up your position: Which is more important to you – your health, your sanity or your career?" (Sophia).

### **Gender-related changes**

The survey indicated that many trans and gender diverse students and staff may embark upon social and / or physical changes – also known as 'transition' – whilst studying in or employed by colleges and universities. It is, therefore, necessary for institutions to develop proactive policies and practices for effective support and understanding. Over 40% (n=54) of respondents had made gender related changes whilst in their current course or post, with a further 12% (n=15) planning to. These changes included 'coming out' as trans or gender diverse, changing name and pronouns, officially changing name and gender on documentation, changing gender presentation, or accessing gender-affirming medical care. Just 21% (n=26) had no plans to make changes – and this may be because all desired gender-related changes had already been attained before the point of entry.

### **Accessing Gender Identity Clinics (GICs)**

Gender Identity Clinics currently deliver the NHS clinical pathway by which trans and gender diverse people can access gender-affirming medical care / medical transition in the UK, including hormone therapies and surgeries. There are four GICs in Scotland – in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Inverness. The waiting time for a first appointment at a GIC can be substantial (up to 16 months in Scotland). Survey respondents were asked about their access to GICs in order to scope what proportion may have accessed or are wanting to access gender-affirming medical care. As set out below, over 80% of respondents have had, currently have, or in future plan to access a Gender Identity Clinic:

- 32% (n=40) of respondents currently access a GIC;
- 15% (n=18) have accessed a GIC in the past;
- 12% (n=15) are currently on the waiting list to attend a GIC;
- A further 20% (n=24) want to access a GIC in the future;
- 16% (n=20) have not accessed and do not intend to access a GIC.

## Findings: thematic analysis

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 20 trans and gender diverse current and recent students (n=17) and staff (n=3) from a range of colleges and universities across Scotland. Interview participants were predominantly recruited via the online survey. Interviews were conducted by the project Research Associate, and took place in person (n=10), over the telephone (n=4), via Skype (n=4), and via e-mail (n=2). Eight predominant themes emerged during analysis of the qualitative interview transcripts and free-text online survey data, each of which is summarised below:

**1. Transitions:** For some students, beginning college or university is an opportunity to start afresh; a place where they can explore and express their emerging gender identity. Participants discussed the challenges of making gender-related changes and accessing gender affirming medical care *whilst* in their current course or job. They discussed the anxiety and trepidation of entering the classroom, lecture theatre or workplace with a different gender expression. If accessing hormone therapy, participants discussed the challenges in navigating peer and professional relationships while their physicality visibly changed. Being referred to with incorrect names and pronouns – and the anticipatory fear of this – factored into a great many participants' experiences and caused considerable daily distress and anxiety.

Navigating administrative systems and institutional bureaucracies emerged as a significant barrier for trans applicants, students and staff. Participants discussed the lack of clear processes across institutions and related external agencies, and many were forced to disclose their trans status – often repeatedly – as a result of these insufficiencies. Younger students in particular expressed concerns about what gender they were permitted to declare on forms and documentation, and were fearful that they may be regarded as 'lying' or in some way dishonest or fraudulent. EU and international students faced particular difficulties because the scope for changing documentation in their home countries often varied significantly from UK and Scottish processes.

**2. Safety:** Many people expressed anxiety about their learning or workplace environment in relation to personal safety or, at the very least, perceived hostility. Thomas described avoiding certain spaces in order to feel safe in relation to his gender expression:

*'I need to be careful about where I go just so nothing gets started... The smoking shelters... it's generally because it's large groups of presumably cis boys, that will already be spitting and swearing and yelling at passers-by ... the canteen as well.'*

Similarly, a survey respondent noted, *'The Students' Union felt really unsafe for me as a trans person. I did not feel like they would have my back; certain individuals made me feel particularly unsafe around them'*.

Even when the campus itself was deemed to be a relatively safe environment, abuse or violence outside would inevitably impact upon someone's studies. Imogen talked of the strong network of support at her university but the impact of abuse outside, *'there's been a few negative backlashes, so I got spat on outside Debenhams, told me I was disgusting. Complete stranger, didn't know him... You can't concentrate on tutorials and stuff when you're just that angry and you don't know who you're angry at'*.

Many people spoke of overt transphobia or covert hostility. For example, one survey respondent described a barrier to their studies as *'Primarily, transphobic lecturers and tutors aggressively teaching as if trans people simply don't exist, repeatedly and on a daily basis – making it very hard to feel safe and comfortable in the learning environment'*. Julie described a catalogue of difficulties in her place of work in relation to her trans identity, including a deliberate and malicious outing. This had culminated in her seeking alternative employment. Julie described the experience thus, *'they had a conscientious and hardworking employee and they destroyed her... made me feel anxious and depressed, and making me feel shunned and devalued, any and all interest I had in the job and the people and the place has been eroded'*.

Whilst they may not have been the subject of prejudice personally, many students had heard their peers expressing transphobic views or using bigoted language about others. This made them feel they could not 'come out' or share their identity with fellow students, which contributed to feelings of unease: *'do I want to work for the next year with these people, knowing that that's what they think? And then suddenly, I don't actually feel safe with them anymore... You know what banter can be like... I wouldn't feel safe as such'* (Isla).

**3. Curriculum:** Many students faced barriers and challenges with respect to teaching and learning. While students reported differing experiences – depending upon the specific institutional, departmental, disciplinary, and classroom cultures – many encountered difficulties with peers, teaching staff, curriculum content, and placements with respect to trans identities and gender diversity. Trans students faced particular challenges in group work with peers, the awareness and behaviour of teaching staff, and the perceived 'laddishness' of particular courses and disciplines. Particularly in Higher Education, many students and staff felt that academic staff are often beyond reproach and that they would not be made accountable by the institution for inappropriate or harmful behaviours.

Students enrolled on professional courses, including Medicine, Nursing, Social Work, Counselling, and Teaching, reflected on the dearth of curriculum content pertaining to

trans people in the training of future practitioners. Some reflected that where issues concerning trans people were discussed in learning and teaching contexts, the content was all too often inaccurate and outdated, and in some cases even offensive and potentially harmful. Students on professional and industrial placements were particularly vulnerable to misunderstanding, hostility and even cruelty in the placement environment.

**4. Gender diversity:** Outside of their often affirmative immediate peer groups, non-binary people faced a general absence of understanding, sometimes accompanied by disparaging and hostile attitudes from the wider college or university community. This lack of understanding and instances of hostility contributed to many non-binary people feeling unable to be open about their identities, the facilities they require, and the language that they wish to be used to address them.

Those who identified their gender in more binary terms – i.e. as men or as women – also faced significant barriers relating to the perceptions of others. A number of trans men discussed the daily difficulties and anxieties associated with ‘*not passing*’ as men, and how this had a significant impact on their emotional wellbeing, alongside their ability to fully participate in educational contexts and engage in social opportunities. Some trans women expressed a feeling of ‘*standing out*’ as *visibly trans*, and detailed the often indirect expressions of unease and transmisogyny they encountered from students, prospective employers and colleagues. Those who expressed their gender in more feminine ways felt at particular risk of animosity and ridicule, including trans women, non-binary people, and trans men who have feminine gender expressions or presentations.

**5. Complexities / Intersections:** A number of complexities and intersecting issues mediate the experiences and lived realities of trans and gender diverse people. The prevalence of mental health issues and conditions emerged as a significant intersecting barrier, as also documented in previous research on the trans population (see McNeill *et al* 2012; Stonewall 2017). Mental health issues and isolation were also encountered by mature trans learners, who often felt disconnected and disengaged from their younger peers.

Some participants faced familial estrangement – in some cases as a direct result of transphobia – which had a number of social, emotional and financial consequences. These participants were often living in unsuitable and unsafe accommodation, whilst others were working full-time to support themselves whilst studying. Financial precarity emerged significantly, as students and prospective staff faced substantial barriers both in securing employment opportunities and in receiving respectful treatment when in the workplace – particularly for those who were ‘visibly’ trans or gender diverse. As Cerys implored, ‘*institutions need to help us to find part-time work and work after graduating*’.

**6. Having to be educators:** Almost all interviewees expressed frustration or disappointment in the lack of awareness amongst staff and students about gender diversity. There was no expectation that academic or support staff should be experts but the current lack of awareness was having a palpably negative effect on their experiences. Many participants had been actively involved in campaigns and educational activities to raise awareness of trans issues and support needs but felt that this should not rely on individuals from within the community. Joshua, for example, had a positive experience coming out to his fellow nursing students and was encouraged to give a lecture to raise awareness for health professionals after having identified issues with the course content – this was not embedded within future curricula, however, and he felt the onus remained on him as a trans identifying student: *‘it was just so draining, and I kept trying to make more stuff happen and felt like it was all on me to do it... I just can’t get up and do this all the time. I need someone else to take responsibility because it shouldn’t be my responsibility’*.

This was mirrored in staff experiences, *‘My organisation had no idea how to deal with my situation and had to learn through me as to how things should be done’* (Survey respondent). Many respondents were happy to be part of campaigns and initiatives to raise awareness and educate but did not wish to necessarily lead these and wanted such activities to be embedded within general policies and training provision. There was also consensus that it was not good enough for institutions to be merely retrospectively responsive – reacting to specific requests or support needs as they presented – rather than developing proactive provision in anticipation of needs and in order to create an inclusive and welcoming campus and workplace culture.

**7. Self-advocacy:** The need for institutions to take the lead, assume they are already teaching and employing gender diverse people, and improve support and policies for them, was highlighted in the theme of self-advocacy. There was a strong split between those who were comfortable as advocates for themselves and others, and those who did not feel able to request the provision to which they were entitled. If support and inclusion is purely reactive, created as and when it is asked for, it may never be developed for those who do not feel able to demand it – those likely most in need.

So, for example, Liam felt confident and willing to advocate, *‘I definitely think that there needs to be more information out there, and I think teaching people’s quite important. That’s why I want colleges and universities to know more about it... I’m totally willing to put myself out there so that other people can learn’*. Penny, similarly, felt able to educate people and act as an ambassador, *‘I think for me, it’s about the ability to, you’ve just got to have the confidence in yourself. You can’t shy away [from] every little thing’*.

These experiences and motivations contrasted sharply with those people who did not wish to be visible or did not know how to approach their institution in relation to their



gender. Many were not in a position to take on an advocacy role, even for themselves. Sebastian spoke of feeling unable to speak out:

*'I could've told our teacher that I identify as a man and should be considered as well, but I simply couldn't. Never have they given me the option of stating my preferred pronouns and brought up the subject. When they state so clearly that they only see one man in the class, how am I supposed to change their minds? What if they turn me down and say that I'm confused? I don't know what would happen because no teacher has ever talked about it; it rather feels like something that should be hidden. So, no I feel like I have no one at college I can talk about this to.'*

Taylor felt unable to speak to their employer about their non-binary identity, despite feeling alienated, *'I never spoke about the fact that I don't necessarily identify with my biological sex, or if there was any other gender that I'd rather identify with, publicly, I never even broached this topic'*. One survey respondent wrote about barriers in their education thus, *'it's more so that I'm closeted and have no idea how to come out. It kind of affects a lot of everything as I'm not capable of being comfortable where I currently am'*.

There are many people who feel able and willing take on an advocacy or ambassadorial role to improve the experiences of fellow trans students and staff. That drive and experience should be encouraged and facilitated. It is clear, however, that a great many students and staff do not feel able or willing to speak out in relation to themselves or others. Allies and general inclusive awareness and training are, therefore, essential.

**8. Othering:** Administrative barriers such as binary gender options on forms, difficulties in updating names and having to use an accessible toilet because of a dearth of gender neutral facilities may all individually be small issues. Collectively, however, they contributed to a feeling of otherness, of difference and perceived hostility. Intrusive questions about physical transition or medical procedures were commonly experienced when peers or colleagues referred to interviewees' trans identity, which further contributed to feelings of unease.

Bathrooms, sports and changing facilities were a common site of othering, alongside halls of residence. Trans and gender diverse students and staff could feel excluded and unwelcome, or be simply unable to access the facilities they required. Participants noted that gender neutral facilities were often simply the accessible ones, which can be few and far between on campus and necessitate lengthy journeys to access. In contrast to practices and unintended cultures that othered gender diverse students and staff, the majority of interviewees were clear that small efforts towards inclusion made an enormous difference to people – promoting a sense of worth, belonging and validation.



## Recommendations

These recommendations have been derived from the research and are intended to provide practical measures to improve the experience of trans and gender diverse students and staff. Although numerous, they do not all need to be instituted at once. The first recommendation of each section would make the most impact and should, therefore, be prioritised where possible.

In the coming months, reflective tools and practical web resources will be made available on the project website – [www.trans.ac.uk](http://www.trans.ac.uk) – to assist individuals and institutions to develop practice and implement the recommendations.

Recommendation	Relevant body
<b>Policy</b>	
<b>1.1 A named contact for all students and prospective students who identify as trans or gender diverse to provide support as a first point of contact. They should be trained in trans awareness, mental health, autism and reporting harassment. Disability Services may not be the most appropriate place to site this support.</b>	All HEIs and colleges Students' Associations All other organisations involved in Further and Higher Education
<b>1.2</b> A named contact for staff and research students.	
<b>1.3</b> Training and awareness-raising remit within role.	
<b>1.4</b> A senior champion within the organisation to drive forward change.	
<b>2.1</b> The development of a specific policy for trans students and staff, incorporating issues such as leave entitlement for medical procedures and appointments.	All HEIs and colleges Students' Associations
<b>2.2</b> Develop policies in close consultation with trans and gender diverse staff and students, and involving all relevant departments and teams.	
<b>2.3</b> Ensure there is liaison with legal representatives in the development of the policy.	

2.4 Consider developing policy as a 'Gender Identity and Gender Expression policy' to incorporate a broader range of people, identities and issues (see website).	
3.1 Provision of gender neutral facilities throughout campuses and buildings including bathrooms, changing rooms and student residences.	All HEIs and colleges Students' Associations
3.2 Consider appropriate signage and provision for non-binary students and staff (see website for ideas).	
4. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of a specific section within Gender Action Plans on issues concerning trans and gender diverse people.	All HEIs and colleges SFC
5.1 Consider issues of time off for, and pay during, leave for medical procedures and appointments related to their gender identity for research students and staff receiving grants and stipends.	All HEIs RCUK and other postgraduate funders
5.2 Support should be provided to staff and students who face barriers in changing their names on publications.	
<b>Awareness raising and training</b>	
6.1 <b>Sustainable and embedded training for teaching and professional services staff at all levels should be provided during induction and as a specific element of equality training.</b>	All HEIs and colleges Students' Associations All other organisations involved in Further and Higher Education Allies and champions
6.2 Consideration should be given to the provision of training for continuing staff on an annual basis	
6.3 Awareness training and compliance should be incorporated into policies for all contractors and within procurement practices.	
7.1 Trans awareness training and CPD opportunities should be essential for counsellors.	All HEIs and colleges Students' Associations
7.2 When recruiting new counsellors or seeking external provision, demonstrable expertise in LGBTQI identities should be a factor in that recruitment process.	

<b>7.3</b> Provision of counselling formats other than via telephones for trans staff and students.	
<b>Processes</b>	
<p><b>8.1</b> Development and promotion of as clear and simple a process as possible for staff and students to update and change their names and gender. This should cascade to all systems.</p> <p><b>8.2</b> Correct names are particularly important on class registers and email accounts.</p> <p><b>8.3</b> Consider whether it is necessary to include gender options and titles on forms and processes. Where this is required, provide an explanation to those completing it.</p> <p><b>8.4</b> Consider carefully if evidence is required before a change can be implemented. In many cases, it is not needed.</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Students' Associations</p> <p>All other organisations involved in Further and Higher Education</p>
<b>9.</b> Development of highly publicised points within application and transition process (for both staff and students) at which to disclose issues related to trans and gender diverse identity, e.g. support/disclosure prior to interview; opportunity to discuss accommodation needs; once registered prior to group allocation within class.	All HEIs and colleges
<b>10.</b> Development and promotion of clear harassment and reporting strategy highlighted on trans webpages.	All HEIs and colleges
<b>Promotion, visibility and celebration</b>	
<p><b>11.1</b> Publication of easily found webpage on 'trans and gender diversity' with links to named contact, and signposting to policies and provision.</p> <p><b>11.2</b> Consider having Faculty or Department pages to address discipline-specific issues i.e. placements, leave, dress code, etc.</p> <p><b>11.3</b> Include campus map of gender neutral facilities on specific trans and main webpages.</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Students' Associations</p> <p>All other organisations involved in Further and Higher Education</p>

<p><b>12.</b> Development of centralised Scotland-wide website for applicants detailing named contacts and specific provision within each college and HEI, similar to the Propel website for care experienced people and developed as part of the <a href="http://www.trans.ac.uk">www.trans.ac.uk</a> website.</p>	SFC
<p><b>13.1</b> Include specific events around trans and gender diversity in Diversity Week and other inclusion celebrations.</p> <p><b>13.2</b> Fly a trans flag and include events in LGBT History month.</p> <p><b>13.3</b> Incorporate official institutional involvement in LGBT+ Pride, Trans Day of Visibility, and Trans Day of Remembrance within annual calendar.</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Students' Associations</p> <p>All other organisations involved in Further and Higher Education</p> <p>Allies and champions</p>
<p><b>14.1</b> Consider whether LGBTQI clubs and societies are genuinely 'T' and ensure trans-specific policies, activities, etc. are developed.</p> <p><b>14.2</b> Consider whether other societies (such as sports teams) are trans and gender diversity inclusive.</p>	<p>Students' Associations</p> <p>Allies and champions</p>
<p><b>15.</b> Include pronouns within email signatures (at individual, team, department or institution level).</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Students' Associations</p> <p>All other organisations involved in Further and Higher Education</p> <p>Allies and champions</p>
<b>Teaching and Learning</b>	
<p><b>16.1</b> Consider trans inclusion and inadvertent transphobia within the curriculum and ways to include trans history, identity and experience within content.</p> <p><b>16.2</b> For those who design and deliver professional programmes – including Medicine, Nursing, Allied Health</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Allies and champions</p>

<p>Professions, Teaching, Social Work, and Counselling – consider opportunities to raise awareness amongst professionals of the future and include trans issues within curriculum.</p> <p><b>16.3</b> Harness LGBTQI and Pride events to engender discussion within classroom contexts.</p>	
<p><b>17.</b> Consider the experience of students on professional and industrial programmes in relation to placements, professional requirements, and uniforms within Equality Impact Assessment processes.</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p>
<p><b>18.</b> Consider introducing pronouns alongside names within introductory and icebreaking teaching contexts (see website for ideas).</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Allies and champions</p>
<p><b>The wider student experience</b></p>	
<p><b>19.</b> Consideration should be given to specific issues and challenges trans and gender diverse students may face obtaining and undertaking placements and work experience. Support provision and specific considerations should be noted in Equality Impact Assessments.</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Students' Associations</p>
<p><b>20.</b> Consider the provision of tailored Careers advice and support activities for trans and gender diverse students, who may require additional support with interviews and securing employment opportunities.</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Students' Associations</p>
<p><b>21.1</b> Advice and support should be given to trans and gender diverse staff and students to allow them to engage in international opportunities. Specific issues should be considered within Equality Impact Assessments.</p> <p><b>21.2</b> All department and student-led exchanges and international opportunities should be considered for potential issues and barriers that may arise for trans and gender diverse participants.</p>	<p>All HEIs and colleges</p> <p>Students' Associations</p>

## Further outputs and activities

A range of further outputs will be developed over the coming months. These include:

- The [www.trans.ac.uk](http://www.trans.ac.uk) website with information, practical tools and training resources for staff in universities and colleges, to be launched in November 2017;
- Leadership Foundation for Higher Education project to develop training materials to empower leadership ([see LFHE project page](#));
- Peer-support Community of Practice for practitioners – events scheduled throughout 17/18 Academic Year;
- A guidance book for HE and FE practitioners, to be published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers in 2018.


## Future research

This project has provided an evidence base on which to build support and provision for trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff in the HE and FE sectors. It has identified areas of concern and provided clear recommendations, informed by those with lived experience, to improve provision and raise awareness.


Further work is necessary, however, before a full understanding of the wider issues of under-representation can be gained. In addition, it is essential that the experiences of this group are monitored to determine whether effective action is being implemented within institutions. In particular, institutions, funders and researchers should seek to concentrate on the following areas:

1. **Access and under-representation issues.** Are trans and gender diverse young people in schools less likely to attain and more likely to leave early and does this, therefore, impact on entry to and attainment in FE and HE?
2. **Gender Action Plans and trans policies.** How are GAPs being implemented in relation to trans staff and students and to what extent are specific policies being developed to promote and safeguard the rights of trans and gender diverse people?
3. **Trans and gender diverse staff and students' experiences of FE and HE in the future.** Are recommendations implemented and what impact does that have on experiences?

## Dissemination Events and Activities

July 2016	<i>TransEdu Scotland Open Meeting, University of Strathclyde</i>	Event for HEFE practitioners, students and staff to learn more about the research, and to share ideas and expertise.
August 2016	National Gender Identity Clinical Network for Scotland AGM, Glasgow	Dissemination of research information.
September 2016	<i>Impacting on Access Conference, Scottish Funding Council and the University of Stirling</i>	Paper presentation: <i>TransEdu Scotland: Investigating the experiences of and support for trans applicants, students and staff in Scottish colleges and universities</i>
November 2016	<i>Connect, Collaborate, Share – Equality Challenge Unit Conference 2016, Nottingham Trent University</i>	Workshop: <a href="#"><i>Researching the experience of trans applicants, students and staff in college and university</i></a>
Dec 2016	<i>TransEdu Scotland Open Meeting, University of Strathclyde</i>	Event for HEFE practitioners, students, staff, and the community to learn more about the research, to contribute ideas, and to share expertise.
February 2017	<i>Educational Fractures and Futures Conference, University of Strathclyde</i>	Paper presentation: <i>TransEdu Scotland: Experiences of trans applicants, students and staff in Scottish colleges and universities.</i>
March 2017	<i>Advances and Challenges in LGBT Research Symposium, University of Strathclyde</i>	Paper presentation: <i>TransEdu Scotland: Experiences of trans applicants, students and staff in Scottish colleges and universities.</i>
	<i>International Women's Day – Be Bold for Change, University of Strathclyde</i>	Paper presentation: <i>TransEdu Scotland: Experiences of trans applicants, students and staff in Scottish colleges and universities.</i>
May 2017	<i>Trans Awareness in Education, University of Strathclyde</i>	Day-long symposium planned and delivered by the <i>TransEdu</i> project, involving trans awareness education sessions, sharing of <i>TransEdu</i> research, panel discussions, and practical workshops. Attended by 100+ practitioners from across Scotland and the UK, and involving third-sector partners including LGBT Youth Scotland and the Scottish Trans Alliance.
		
	Equality Challenge Unit Scottish Liaison Group Meeting, Glasgow	Briefing for Scottish HE Equality & Diversity practitioners.



	<i>TransForming Medicine: Perspectives on Transgender Healthcare Conference, Lancaster University</i>	<i>Paper presentation: Taking time off: Accessing gender-affirming medical care whilst in employment or education</i>
June 2017	<i>Supporting LGBT+ Students and Staff in HE, Westminster Briefing, London</i>	<i>Paper presentation: Supporting the needs of transgender applicants, students and staff</i>
	ERASMUS+ Exchange with Trinity College Dublin, Ireland   <b>Trinity College Dublin</b> Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath The University of Dublin	<i>Week-long exchange to share best practice on trans equality and inclusion in HE with practitioners, academic staff and students at Trinity College Dublin, as well as third-sector partners including the Transgender Equality Network for Ireland and BeLonGTo.</i>
	<i>Concepts of Value and Worth – Forum for Access and Continuing Education Annual Conference, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Glasgow School of Art</i>	<i>Paper presentation: TransEdu Scotland: Supporting transgender applicants, students and staff in FE and HE</i>
July 2017	<i>Annual Trans and Non-Binary Conference, University of Brighton</i>	<i>Paper presentation: TransEdu Scotland: Trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff in Further and Higher Education</i>
August 2017	<i>NUS Scotland Gathering, National Union of Students, Glasgow Caledonian University</i>	<i>Workshop: TransEDU: Supporting trans and gender diverse students</i>
September 2017	<i>Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland</i>	<i>Paper presentation: TransEDU: Supporting trans and gender diverse applicants, students and staff</i>
	<i>Second Annual LGBTQ Inclusivity in Higher Education Conference: Facing the Dragon, Swansea University</i>	<i>Paper presentation: Trans inclusion: Exploring the experiences of trans and gender diverse students and staff in HE</i>
October 2017	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> British Association of Gender Identity Specialists Symposium – Listening to the Trans and Non-Binary Community, Glasgow</i>	<i>Paper presentation: TransEDU: Trans and gender diverse people in the Further and Higher Education Sectors</i>
November 2017	<i>TransEdu Scotland Dissemination Event</i>	<i>Dissemination of the TransEdu Scotland research findings and recommendations, and launch of the TransEDU website, hosting a suite of resources, information and training materials for the HEFE sectors.</i>

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## Appendix I: Third sector organisations who assisted with participant recruitment

- ❖ **Gendered Intelligence:** Not-for-profit Community Interest Company working with the trans community and those who impact on trans lives. <http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/>
- ❖ **LGBT Health and Wellbeing:** Community initiative that promotes the health, wellbeing and equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Scotland. <http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/>
- ❖ **LGBT Youth Scotland:** Youth and community-based organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Scotland. <https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/>
- ❖ **Mermaids UK:** Family and individual support for teenagers and children with gender identity issues. <http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/>
- ❖ **Scottish Trans Alliance:** Works to improve gender identity and gender reassignment equality, rights and inclusion in Scotland. <http://www.scottishtrans.org/>